

News

Unveiled: a world-class



WORK IN PROGRESS: the Victoria Square development, viewed from Ann Street, will be opened next Thursday

Pictures: Brian Little

BY KATE CHAMBRÉ

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IN just over a week Belfast will be catapulted into one of the world's top retail shopping capitals when Victoria Square opens its doors to the public.

At present over 1,500 people are working around the clock to see that the £400 million state-of-the-art shopping centre opens on the morning of Thursday, March 6 – a day on which 10,000 shoppers are expected to visit.

To say that Victoria Square – which was planned approximately a decade ago and has been under construction for nearly four years – is impressive, is an understatement.

Everything from its architecture, its wide selection of fashion outlets and eateries, to its cinema, apartments (of which there will be 106), and funky toilets, not to forget eco-friendly roof, has been impeccably thought out.

Hugh Black, manager of Victoria Square, said no expense has been spared on the interior architectural design of the development, which blends the old and the new.

“Victoria Square is world-class. Architecturally it’s pretty stunning and unique and the wide-ranging mix of fashion retailers it will offer will be completely new to Belfast,” he said.

The pièce de résistance of the structure is undoubtedly its modern dome, which is modelled on the same design as Belfast City Hall’s. Beneath it there is a public space, which will offer shoppers a breathtaking view of some of the city’s finest landmarks.

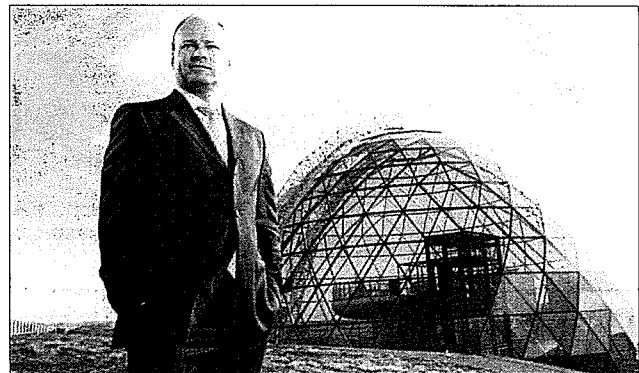
“The 24-hour lighting system (which changes colour throughout the day) on the dome has also been designed by one of the world’s foremost lighting experts,” Mr Black said.

A fountain built in 1874 commemorating linen merchant Daniel Joseph Jaffa highlights the historical dimension to Victoria Square.

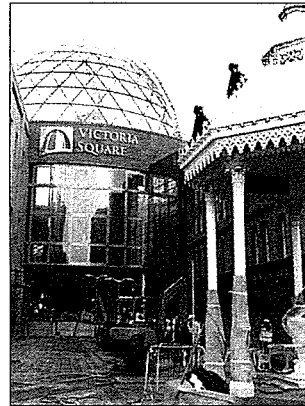
The artefact was commissioned by Mr Jaffa’s sons – one of whom was Sir Otto Jaffa who later became Lord Mayor of Belfast – and has been restored and repositioned in its original location at the Victoria Street entrance to the shopping centre.

Victoria Square, which has been built by local contractors Farrans Gilbert Ash, is expected to provide over 3,000 jobs, not to mention regeneration of the southern quarter of the city centre.

The shopping centre, built on 14 acres, will include approximately 800,000sq ft of retail space over three floors. Restaurants, bars and cafes will be housed on a fourth level. Department store giant House of Fraser will be spread out over five floors.



TOP JOB: Hugh Black, manager of Victoria Square



GLASS ACT: the dome is one the highlights of the new complex

shopping spectacular

"Main stream (high street) retailers will be located at upper ground level, while aspirational retailers (high end) will be located on the lower ground level," Mr Black said.

The 98 units (including House of Fraser) are expected to expand Belfast's city-centre shopping facilities by almost a third.

"Northern Ireland has been starved of good strong retailers for so long. The House of Fraser, in particular, is going to bring a whole new dimension to fashion retail here. It's also going to be its biggest store in the UK. Ladies will absolutely love it," Mr Black said.

Management at Victoria Square have been working alongside the Castle Court shopping centre and other retailers in Belfast city centre, Mr Black said, in order to "create one of the best shopping destinations in the whole of Ireland and Europe".

Aside from Victoria's commercial focus, it also has an ecologically friendly vision.

A large section of the roof has been covered in sedum - a combination of moss and heather - in an attempt to reduce the carbon footprint of Victoria Square. This material soaks up rain water which lets it evaporate naturally over time rather than overload draining systems. It's thought to be the first of its kind in Ulster.

Shoppers will be able to access nearby businesses, shops and nightspots at Laganside, Donegall Place, Royal Avenue and Ann Street by a pedestrian link.

Victoria Square, like CastleCourt shopping centre, will offer late-night shopping from 9am until 9pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, a move Belfast City Council is hoping all other city-centre retailers will follow. The shopping centre will remain open until 7pm on Mondays and Tuesdays and until 6pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

The two levels of basement parking - with 1,000 spaces - will have a special rate of £3.50 from around 5pm to 1am to accommodate the shopping centre's eateries and its eight-screen Odeon cinema, which is expected to open in June. Victoria Square opens to the public from 9.30am next Thursday.

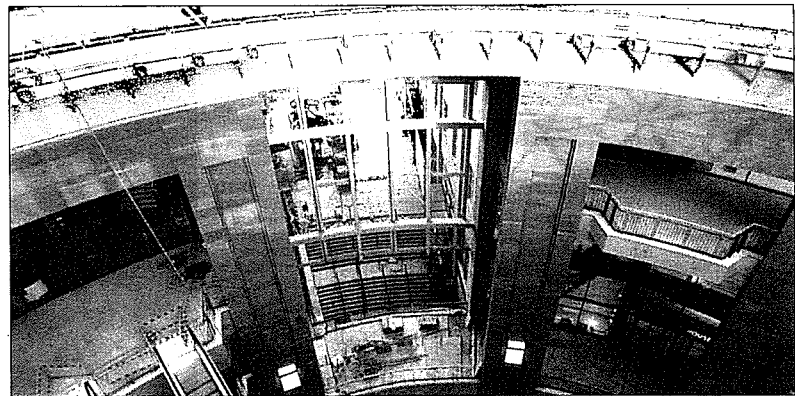
The store will officially open at 10.30am when a "spectacular show" will take place with entertainment by a variety of local and international artists including Broadway performers.

It should also be noted that management at Victoria Square have been working in conjunction with the PSNI to ensure that traffic is properly managed on the day of the opening.

For further information, including job advertisements, visit www.victoriasquare.com



RETAIL THERAPY: the shopping centre has been under construction for almost four years



GRAND DESIGNS: an artist's impression of the centre

Shoppers spoil for choice

WOMEN will be introduced to a whole new shopping experience when Victoria Square opens next week.

But without doubt, one of its biggest attractions will be House of Fraser which will offer 500 brands under one roof.

It will be the retail giant's biggest department store in the UK.

Taking this into account it is of no surprise that over 17 million people are expected to visit Victoria Square each year.

House of Fraser will be spread over five floors and will include the world-famous Hamleys toy store - its first time in the Province.

Beauty legends Crème

de la Mer, Prescriptives and Laura Mercier as well as fashion from All Saints, Joseph, Ghost and House of Fraser's own ranges - Therapy, Linea and Untold - and luxury lingerie from Agent Provocateur and La Perla will also arrive here for the first time when the store opens.

It goes without saying that House of Fraser will also wow women with its 6,000sq ft Handbag Heaven and its 4,000sq ft shoe department.

Shoppers will be able to rest their weary feet at the champagne and oyster bar on the lower ground floor or take advantage of the top-floor restaurant, which fea-

tures a large terrace overlooking the Lagan and will operate after shopping hours for those wishing to make a night of it.

The store will be managed by Ulster-born Michelle Jackson who is originally from Kells near Ballymena.

Michelle, 37, has spent her whole career with House of Fraser and has been manager for a number of the company's high-profile stores across the UK and Ireland.

"I think House of Fraser recognises that it is very important to have someone here who understands Northern Ireland so that we can adapt to the needs of the Northern Irish market," she said.

THE A TO Z RETAIL GUIDE TO VICTORIA SQUARE

But watch this space, because there are more to come...

All Saints	Cruise	Hugo Boss	Monsoon	Reiss
Billabong	Faith	Holland and Barrett	Nandos	Remus Uomo
Build-A-Bear Workshop	Firetrap	Hardy Amies	O2	River Island
Cafe BBs	Fossil	JD Sports	O'Briens	Spur Steak & Grill
Carphone Warehouse	Free Spirit	Kitchen Bar	Odeon	Starbucks
Chill's	French Connection	La Senza	Pepe	Ted Baker
Claire's	Geox	Lavis	Perfume Shop	The Pier
Accessories	Goldsmiths	LK Bennett	Pizza Hut	Tom Tailor
Clockwork Orange	Gourmet Burger Kitchen	Lunns	Prezzo	Tommy Hilfiger
Coast	H&M	The Laptop Shop	Puma	Top Shop
Costa Coffee	Hobbs	Maggianos	Pumpkin Patch	Urban Outfitters
	House of Fraser	McDonalds	Q-Park	Vodafone
			Regis	Zavvi



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